

Strategic Calculation in Estonia's Decision to Enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003

A Monograph

by

LTC Janno Märk
Estonian Defense Forces



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2015-01

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

| REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE | | | | Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188 | |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|
| Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS. | | | | | |
| 1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 21-05-2015 | | 2. REPORT TYPE Monograph | | 3. DATES COVERED (From - To) June 2014 - May 2015 | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Strategic Calculation in Estonia's Decision to Enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 | | | | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5b. GRANT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) LTC Janno Märk | | | | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5e. TASK NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies 250 Gibbon Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027 | | | | 8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College 1 Reynolds Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027 | | | | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) CGSC, SAMS | |
| | | | | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) | |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited | | | | | |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | | | | | |
| 14. ABSTRACT This study concerns itself with Estonia's security policy and decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003. The thesis argues that historical experiences deeply influenced Estonia's security policy choices in the 1990s, which in turn played a key role in the country's decision to join the coalition for OIF. Different regional powers have conquered Estonia throughout its history and the brief period of independence between the two world wars was lost after the country attempted to pursue a policy of neutrality. The twentieth century witnessed both Soviet and German occupations. Based on historical experience and specific threat perception, all Estonian governments since the restoration of independence in 1991 have made efforts to integrate the country into Western economic and security structures, such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Estonia's decision to serve as a coalition partner during OIF in 2003 was a logical continuation of the country's security policy choices. The research demonstrates that this decision was based mainly on the pragmatic calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties, while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures. | | | | | |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS Security Policy, Military Strategy, International Relations, Political Science | | | | | |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES 45 | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON COL Henry Arnold |
| a. REPORT (U) | b. ABSTRACT (U) | c. THIS PAGE (U) | | | 19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code) (913) 758-3313 |

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: LTC Janno Märk

Monograph Title: Strategic Calculation in Estonia's Decision to Enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Christopher Marsh, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
David M. Wood, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 21st day of May 2015 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the US Army Command and General Staff College, Estonian Defense Forces or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

Abstract

Strategic Calculation in Estonia's Decision to Enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, by LTC Janno Märk, 45 pages.

This study concerns itself with Estonia's security policy and decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003. The thesis argues that historical experiences deeply influenced Estonia's security policy choices in the 1990s, which in turn played a key role in the country's decision to join the coalition for OIF. Different regional powers have conquered Estonia throughout its history and the brief period of independence between the two world wars was lost after the country attempted to pursue a policy of neutrality. The twentieth century witnessed both Soviet and German occupations. Based on historical experience and specific threat perception, all Estonian governments since the restoration of independence in 1991 have made efforts to integrate the country into Western economic and security structures, such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Estonia's decision to serve as a coalition partner during OIF in 2003 was a logical continuation of the country's security policy choices. The research demonstrates that this decision was based mainly on the pragmatic calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties, while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acronyms | vi |
| Tables | vii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Background and Significance..... | 1 |
| Historiography and Research Questions | 2 |
| Methodology | 2 |
| Outline of the Study | 5 |
| Part One: Main Factors That Have Shaped the Estonians' National Character - Historical | |
| Background | 6 |
| Estonia's Geo-political Position..... | 7 |
| Brief History from the 13 th Century | 7 |
| Estonia's Independence in the Interwar Period, 1918–39 | 9 |
| The Fifty-Year Soviet Occupation | 11 |
| Part Two: Security Policy Options during the 1990s | 13 |
| Estonia's Security Environment during the 1990s | 13 |
| The Neutrality Option | 16 |
| The Regional Cooperation Option..... | 18 |
| Integration into Western Structures..... | 20 |
| Part Three: Major Operation Abroad - Operation Iraqi Freedom..... | 25 |
| Conclusion 1 | 26 |
| Conclusion 2..... | 28 |
| Conclusion 3..... | 31 |
| Conclusion 4..... | 32 |
| Conclusion 5..... | 34 |
| Conclusion 6..... | 36 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Conclusion..... | 39 |
| Bibliography | 42 |
| Appendix A: Questionnaire | 46 |
| Appendix B: Informed Consent Release | 48 |

Acronyms

| | |
|------------|--|
| BALTBAT | Baltic Battalion |
| BALTDEFCOL | Baltic Defense College |
| BALTNET | Baltic Air Surveillance Network |
| BALTRON | Baltic Naval Squadron |
| CEEC | Central and Eastern European Countries |
| COIN | Counterinsurgency |
| EDF | Estonian Defense Forces |
| EU | European Union |
| ISIL | Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MOD | Ministry of Defense |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| OIF | Operation Iraqi Freedom |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| PfP | Partnership for Peace |
| SFOR | NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| SOFA | Status of Force Agreement |
| UN | United Nations |
| US | United States |
| WEU | Western European Union |
| WMD | Weapons of Mass Destruction |
| WWII | World War II |

Tables

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Table 1. Interviewee Data | 3 |
|---------------------------------|---|

Introduction

Background and Significance

Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing and provide highly professional troops without caveats for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003 further ensured its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership the following year and strengthened its bilateral relationship with the United States. Since the NATO and European Union (EU) enlargements in 2004, the Baltic region has been stable. Estonia's NATO membership has played a key role in enhancing its stability and prosperity.

The international security environment has changed since the Cold War era. Estonia restored its independence in 1991 and gained membership in NATO and the EU in 2004. It is important for Estonia's partners to understand the main factors that have shaped the Estonians' mindset, national character, and the country's defense policy goals and decisions. And more importantly, the strategic calculations in Estonia's decision to enter OIF as a member of the Coalition of the Willing in 2003 (before Estonia's NATO and EU accession).

Today, state-on-state war is eroding. Conventional conflicts between states with large armies are not likely in the short term, but possible in the long term. Since the end of the Cold War, asymmetrical conflicts have emerged as non-state actors and organizations with widely disparate beliefs have become major actors in war. Such groups use organized asymmetrical violence to achieve their political ends, to promote an ideology, or to satisfy greed.

The aforementioned and the fact that one of the priorities of the Estonian Defense Forces (EDF) is to achieve a capability to join international operations with a battalion task force, makes this research into Estonia's strategic calculations and the readiness of Estonian troops to conduct Counterinsurgency (COIN) in a contemporary asymmetrical warfare relevant.

Historiography and Research Questions

This thesis is about Estonia's security policy and decision to enter OIF as a member of the Coalition of the Willing. The aim of the study is to confirm the historical interpretation that Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the Willing for OIF was based mainly on the calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties, while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures. This interpretation is based upon realist international relations theory. According to classical realism, states are driven by self-interest, and the purpose of statecraft is national survival in a hostile anarchical environment.¹ Estonia's decision was consistent with realist foreign policy propositions regarding small state behavior, which will be further discussed below in the Methodology section.

The primary research question supporting the investigation was, what were the strategic calculations and implications in Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for OIF in 2003? Also, two sub-questions were explored: 1. What were the main factors in shaping the mindset of Estonians, their national character, and the country's defense policy goals and decisions? 2. What was the readiness of Estonian troops to conduct COIN operations in OIF and what were the lessons learned? How did it feed back to the strategic level?

Methodology

As the sources in this field are rather scarce or classified, the present thesis, as qualitative research, focuses mainly on the analysis of information from primary sources (written official documents and oral history interviews). The interviews aimed at both the Estonian civilian and military leadership that were the decision makers at the time. This investigation used focused interviews because a representative, random survey was not relevant for this project. The study

¹ Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 29.

concentrated on respondents with specific decision-making experiences from 2003 and professional qualifications. Therefore, an exploratory methodology was used to target personnel meeting the required criteria. The oral history interviews that were conducted utilized a semi-structured interview methodology with an open-ended questionnaire to guide the process (see Appendix A: Questionnaire).

The persons interviewed for this thesis were and in large part still are Estonian government officials and military officers who were responsible for dealing with security policy. In total, eleven (of thirteen requests) persons responded to interview requests (see Table 1: Interviewee Data).

| Nr | Interviewee Name | Position in 2003 | Current Position |
|-----|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | General Ants Laaneots | Commandant of the Estonian National Defense College | Chief of Defense 2006-2011 |
| 2. | Vice Admiral Tarmo Kõuts | Chief of Defense 2000-2006 | Retired |
| 3. | Major General Riho Terras | Defense Attaché in Germany and Poland | Chief of Defense since 2011 |
| 4. | Major General Neeme Väli | Staff position in J5, EDF Headquarters | Director Plans and Policy, Deputy Director General. International Military Staff, NATO Headquarters |
| 5. | Brigadier General Meelis Kiili | Deputy Chief of Staff of the Estonian Army, EDF | Commander of Estonian Defense League |
| 6. | Brigadier General Indrek Sirel | Deputy Head J5, EDF Headquarters | Division Head, Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum |
| 7. | Mr. Harri Tiido | Undersecretary for Security Policy, MFA | Estonian Ambassador to Poland |
| 8. | Mr. Margus Kolga | Vice chancellor of policy and international affairs, MOD | Permanent representative of Estonia in UN |
| 9. | Mr. Jüri Luik | Head of Government Delegation in Accession Talks with NATO, MFA | Estonian Ambassador to Russia |
| 10. | Mr. Sven Sakkov | Deputy director of Defense Policy and Planning Department, MOD | Undersecretary for Defense Policy, MOD |
| 11. | Mr. Kristjan Prikk | Third Secretary, Estonian Embassy in Washington, DC | Deputy director of the National Security and Defense Coordination Unit, Government Office |

Table 1. Interviewee Data

Source: Created by author.

The oral history interviews took place via email. The initial email described the monograph topic, research questions, and requested the subject's consent to take part in the study. The anonymity of interviewees was offered, but no one requested it (see Appendix B: Informed Consent Release). Upon completion of the interviews, interviewee accounts were analyzed to determine whether the prevailing interpretation fits the historical facts. Responses provided qualitative data for assessment. Official written documentation was also used as a significant source to complement the interviews.

The realist school of thought attempts to explain small states' behavior in foreign policy. Estonia is a small country in terms of territory, population, and international influence bordering a powerful assertive state, Russia. For a small country, seeking a distant protector is standard practice in international politics.² Based on realist theory, a small nation must look to the assistance of powerful friends for the protection of its rights.³ According to the "balance of threat" concept, states' alliance behavior is determined by the threat they perceive from other states. Stephen Walt contends that states generally balance by allying against a perceived threat, although weak states might also bandwagon, that is, ally with the state that poses the major threat in order to protect their own security. If balancing, then states are more secure because aggressors face combined opposition. If bandwagoning, then security is scarce because aggression is rewarded.⁴ Balance of power theorists from German historian Ranke⁵ forward have persistently shown that states facing an external threat overwhelmingly prefer to balance against the threat.

² Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 3 (Fall, 2003), 385.

³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 282.

⁴ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985), 4.

⁵ Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) was a German historian, generally recognized as a founder of the modern objective historical school. He applied and elaborated the scientific method of historical investigation.

This is mainly because an alignment that preserves most of a state's freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination under a potential hegemon.⁶ Safety for all states depends on the maintenance of a balance among them.⁷ By choosing membership in a larger political community or international organization, a small state might sacrifice some of its sovereignty. At the same time, it gains greater protection and a more solid economic foundation that flow from membership in the broader community or organization.⁸

Outline of the Study

This study argues that Estonians' collective historical experiences heavily influenced the country's security policy choices in 1990s. These choices in turn played a key role in Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

Part one of the monograph introduces the historical background for Estonian security policy. Different regional powers have conquered Estonia throughout its history and the brief period of independence between the two world wars was lost after Estonia attempted to pursue a policy of neutrality. The results were incredibly disastrous. Because of Soviet, Nazi, and the Second Soviet occupation, Estonia lost (either as killed, refugees or deported) around one fourth of her pre-war population during the Second World War (WWII). The Soviet Union's annexation of Estonia after WWII further deteriorated the situation. Thus, part two discusses that since regaining independence, all Estonian governments have made efforts to integrate Estonia into Western organizations – mainly NATO and the EU – as a policy to avoid the tragic loss of independence and sovereignty again.

⁶ Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," 15.

⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 132.

⁸ Charles O. Lerche, Jr., *Principles of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 327.

The third and final part largely analyzes responses of oral history interviews and examines the historical interpretation that Estonia's decision to join OIF was based mainly on the calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures. Part three also observes that Estonia provided highly professional, learning, and adaptive troops without caveats for OIF, which raised the profile of the country and her military within NATO and in bilateral relations with the United States.

Part One

Main Factors That Have Shaped the Estonians' National Character -

Historical Background

Part one of the thesis introduces the historical background that has shaped the Estonians' mindset, national character, and the country's defense policy decisions in the 1990s. Since the thirteenth century, foreign powers occupied Estonia, such as Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Russia. The twentieth century witnessed both Soviet and German occupations. Hence, Estonian's desire for freedom and independence has been an enduring phenomenon. Realist propositions regarding small states' conduct in foreign policy embrace that it is difficult and problematic for a small neutral country to remain independent while neighboring hegemonic powers with geopolitical interest to expand their territories.

Part one is divided into four sections. The first section highlights Estonia's geopolitical position; the second section explains briefly the history from the 13th century; the third section provides an overview of Estonia's independence in the interwar period and reveals that the attempts to initiate regional security cooperation as well as neutrality option failed; and the fourth section discusses the fifty-year suffering due to the Soviet occupation.

Estonia's Geo-political Position

Geo-political position is an essential constraint on a state's existence and survival. Since states cannot choose their neighbors and their location is constant, they must find the best strategies of dealing with their neighbors, particularly the most powerful ones. Thus, relations and interactions among states, as well as friendships and enmities among them, are determined largely by geo-strategic realities.⁹ Estonia's geographical position has crucially shaped its history.

Estonia is located on the coast of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland and has land borders with the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation. The length of the border shared with Latvia is 339 kilometers and 294 kilometers with Russia. Estonia's closest overseas neighbor is Finland with Helsinki less than 50 nautical miles away from Tallinn, Estonia's capital. Estonia is a maritime country. The length of its coastline 3,800 kilometers is about six times longer than the mainland border. In economic terms, Estonia's strategic trade transit location with good sea access has been beneficial for the State, but has threatened its security and independence.

Estonia is as a small country in every respect. Its territory is 45,227 square kilometers, roughly the size of Maryland, and the population is nearly 1.4 million. The ethnic composition of the population is approximately 70% Estonians and 30% other nationalities. Russians, the largest minority group, make up almost 25% of the total population. Estonia is the world's smallest continental nation-state with its own distinct language and a fully developed modern culture based on this language.¹⁰

Brief History from the 13th Century

Estonia's struggles for freedom and independence during the twentieth century were mainly a reaction to nearly 700 years of foreign rule. Before 1200, Estonians lived largely as free

⁹ Efraim Karsh, *Neutrality and Small States* (London: Routledge, 1988), 81.

¹⁰ Rein Taagepera, *Estonia – Return to Independence* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 4.

peasants loosely organized into parishes, which in turn were grouped into counties.¹¹ By 1200, Estonian population was at least 150,000.¹² In the beginning of the thirteen century, the Estonians and Latvians came under assault from German and Danish crusaders. Their conquest of the area imposed foreign control over those lands for next three centuries.

Estonia became a battleground again in the sixteenth century while Germans, Russians, Poles, and Swedes fought many wars over controlling the important geographical position of the country as a gateway between East and West. Estonia fell under Swedish rule from 1561 - 1710. The era from 1558 to 1721 was one of almost continuous rivalry and warfare in the region, witnessing a series of major conflicts between Sweden and Russia: the First Northern War (the Livonian War) 1558 - 1583, the Second Northern War 1655 - 1660, and the Great Northern War 1700 - 1721.¹³ The period ended with the defeat of Sweden resulting in Tsarist Russian rule in Estonia for the next 200 years. Wars were accompanied by devastating famine, plague, and huge population losses in Estonia, but subsequent years of peace in the eighteenth century enabled demographic recovery.¹⁴

By the mid-nineteenth century, Estonians were fast to organize and develop into an independent society and nation. Industrialization also eroded the old order. The visible Estonian national awakening arose between 1860 and 1885.¹⁵ The fall of the tsarist regime in February 1917 forced the issue of Estonia's political future. Vigorous lobbying in Petrograd forced the provisional government to accept Estonia's territorial unification as one province and the election of a provincial assembly, the Maapäev, later that year. The Bolshevik overthrow in Petrograd in

¹¹ Walter R. Iwaskiw, ed., *Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Country Studies* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1996), 12.

¹² Taagepera, *Estonia – Return to Independence*, 14.

¹³ Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 43.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Taagepera, *Estonia – Return to Independence*, 31.

November 1917 extended to Estonia as well, until Germany occupied Estonia in February 1918. As the Bolsheviks retreated from Tallinn and the German occupation army entered the city, the Committee of Elders of the Maapäev declared the country independent on February 24, 1918.¹⁶

Estonia's Independence in the Interwar Period, 1918-39

Contrary to its later peaceful return to independence in 1991, Estonia's first modern era of sovereignty began with the War of Independence (1918-20) fought against Russian Bolshevik and Baltic German forces.¹⁷ In that war, the British and Finnish governments assisted Estonia.¹⁸ This foreign assistance is considered one of the earliest cases of an independent Estonia cooperating with other states regarding security matters. During their wars of independence, the Baltic states also cooperated with each other to achieve independence from Soviet Russia.¹⁹ In the Tartu Peace Treaty, signed with Russia in February 1920, Moscow relinquished all claims to Estonia in perpetuity.

The newly independent Baltic states sought to secure their place in the international system. They were optimistic of the newly created League of Nations, with its collective security guarantee combined with a regional alliance from Finland to Poland.²⁰ Hence, Estonia joined the League of Nations on September 21, 1921, and was active to initiate regional political and military cooperation.²¹ However, the Vilnius dispute with Warsaw undermined all efforts to

¹⁶ Iwaskiw, ed., *Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Country Studies*, 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1991), 99.

¹⁹ David M. Crowe, *The Baltic States and the Great Powers: Foreign Relations, 1938–1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 7.

²⁰ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 119.

²¹ Walter J. Clemens, Jr., *The Baltic Transformed: Complexity Theory and European Security* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 6.

establish an effective Baltic league by making it impossible to include both Lithuania and Poland in the same alliance. Estonia and Latvia preferred Poland, with its vastly superior military power, as their partner. At the same time, the Finns did not want to risk being dragged into war by their southern neighbors and instead began to pursue a Scandinavian orientation. Only the minimum version, a defense alliance between just Estonia and Latvia, concluded in 1923.²²

Varying perceptions of threat also hampered Baltic co-operation. The Estonians saw Soviet Russia as the only potential enemy. The Latvians were equally worried about Russia and Germany. For the Lithuanians, Russia was its sole supporter against Poland, the country that the Latvians and Estonians viewed as a vital ally.²³ For most of the interwar period, the Baltic states practiced only limited cooperation, and their political and economic ties remained weak.²⁴

The security of the Baltic states deteriorated drastically in the second half of the 1930s. The expansionist policy of Nazi Germany undermined the League of Nation upon whose collective security guarantee the Baltic states had placed their hopes. The Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 effectively left the Baltic Sea under German control and extinguished any hope of British assistance in a future crisis. As anxiety over a potential war in Europe escalated at the end of the 1930s, the Baltic states, following the Scandinavian example, sought refuge in declarations of neutrality - Estonia and Latvia in December 1938, and Lithuania in January 1939. Although the Baltic states signed non-aggression treaties with the Soviet Union (Estonia and Latvia in 1932, and Lithuania in 1926) and Germany in the spring of 1939, their declarations of neutrality would not deter these powerful neighbors.²⁵

²² Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 120.

²³ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁴ Kevin O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 105.

²⁵ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 123.

The Fifty-Year Soviet Occupation

The Soviet - Nazi Nonaggression Pact (also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) concluded on August 23, 1939, enabled Hitler to attack Poland and Stalin to end Baltic independence, among other consequences. The Soviet absorption of the Baltic states gave Stalin an important buffer zone between the Soviet Union and Germany. It did buy the Soviets a few months and some valuable territory.²⁶ With rapid political maneuvering, Stalin forced the installation pro-Soviet governments in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius. Soviet-style elections were held, which granted “Soviet-minded” representatives of the working class domination of all seats.²⁷ Meanwhile, the Soviet Union quietly deported or killed Estonian political leaders.

Although the Estonian government decided against armed resistance, the people of Estonia did not welcome Soviet rule. Estonia’s only hope for the restoration of its freedom and independence would lay in continued Western recognition of its de jure statehood, which European countries and the United States declared in 1940. Because of this recognition, Estonia’s claims for independence from Soviet Union by early 1990 could not be considered merely secessionism. Rather, they represented a demand for the restoration of a state still existent under international law.²⁸

The 1941 German invasion interrupted the Soviet Union’s absorption of Estonia. Yet, the single year of Soviet rule left a deeply negative impression on the people of Estonia. From June 13-14, before the German invasion, Estonians saw the Soviets forcibly deporting about 10,000 of their fellow citizens to Siberia.²⁹ It was a repressive measure aimed at breaking any resistance to

²⁶ Condoleeza Rice, “The Making of Soviet Strategy,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 670.

²⁷ Mart Laar, *War in the Woods: Estonia’s Struggle for Survival 1944-1956* (Washington, DC: The Compass Press, 1992), 7.

²⁸ Iwaskiw, ed., *Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Country Studies*, 19.

²⁹ Ibid.

Soviet rule. The 1941-44 German occupation witnessed further repression, particularly of Estonia's Jewish population. In September 1944, as the Red Army again moved towards Estonia, the memories of Soviet rule resurfaced causing some 70,000 Estonians to flee the country into exile. From 1939 to 1945, Estonia lost over 20 percent of its population to due Soviet and German imperialism.³⁰ After the war, the Sovietization of Estonia continued forcing agricultural collectivization. In March 1949, another more brutal wave of deportations involved some 25,000 people.³¹ The 1940s were a tragic decade for the Estonians.

By the 1970s, the old methods of shooting or deporting unreliable Balts had been replaced by imprisonment and, in some cases, by exile abroad.³² As part of Russification, Estonia faced immigration from all over the Soviet Union. While ethnic Estonians had made up 92 percent of Estonia's population in 1939, the figure dropped to 64.5 percent by 1980.³³

The beginning of *Glasnost* (openness) and *Perestroika* (restructuring) initiated a period of liberalization from which the dying superpower would never recover.³⁴ Starting in 1987, Estonia's "singing revolution" emerged with a cycle of mass demonstrations featuring spontaneous singing. In June 1988, 300,000 Estonians gathered and sang national songs and hymns that were strictly forbidden during the years of the Soviet occupation. The singing revolution culminated with Estonia's Supreme Soviet seizing historic opportunity and proclaiming the country's independence during the Russian August putsch in 1991.

Throughout the occupation, Estonia preserved its national identity connecting nationalism to its interest in folklore, culture, and local history. Estonians also continued to hold the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 20.

³² O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 139.

³³ Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 353.

³⁴ Iwaskiw, ed., *Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Country Studies*, 20.

nationwide Song Festivals, a beloved tradition since national awakening. The country had memories and legacy of its pre-Soviet independence, democracy, and civic culture.³⁵

Part Two

Security Policy Options during the 1990s

After achieving independence, Estonia had theoretically three basic security options: pursuing a neutrality policy, cooperating regionally with Finland and the other two Baltic states, or striving for integration into Western structures. To discuss these alternatives, the first section of part two provides an overview of Estonia's security environment during the 1990s. The second and third sections explain neutrality and regional cooperation options, revealing their non-viability. The fourth and final section demonstrates that integration into Western economic and security structures such as the EU and NATO was in practice the only one realistic security policy option for the country. Furthermore, the responses from the interviewees largely supported that position. This choice was consistent with realist propositions regarding small state behavior. Part two also shows that Estonia's decision to join OIF in 2003 was a logical continuation of the country's security policy choices.

Estonia's Security Environment during the 1990s

A retired General Ants Laaneots, the former Estonian Chief of Defense (CHOD), put it straightforwardly: "The historical source of threat to our independence has been and will remain Russia with its special interest towards the Baltic region and its great-power politics."³⁶ Yet, the most urgent concern for Estonia at the beginning of the 1990s was the presence of Russian troops on its territory. The exact number of troops stationed in Estonia at the time was debatable and

³⁵ Graham Smith, ed., *The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994), 121.

³⁶ Ants Laaneots, *Eesti Vabariigi julgeolekukontseptsiooni areng aastail 1991-1994 ja kõrgkoolid* (Aulaloeng, 1996).

actual figures remained classified. Even the Estonian government did not possess that information. However, it has been estimated that the number was at least 40,000 troops and 150,000 including family members.³⁷ It took more than two years and nineteen rounds of negotiations to sign the agreement on July 26, 1994, on the withdrawal of Russian military forces.³⁸ An active US pressure was instrumental in safeguarding the removal of these troops after social guarantees were extended to retired Soviet military personnel remaining in the country. This demonstrates that in the modern globalizing environment, a small state can under favorable circumstances muster considerable political power (international support in the form of political pressure) to support the achievement of its goals.³⁹

Nevertheless, the relationship between the two countries remained calm and unfriendly. Russia has been harshly critical of the status of ethnic Russians in Estonia and the country's pursuit of NATO membership. In turn, Estonia, was alarmed by Russia's assertion of its privileged sphere of influence in its "near abroad".⁴⁰ Russian foreign minister Kozyrev defined the "near abroad" as a "unique, sui generis geopolitical space, to which nobody but Russia could bring peace."⁴¹ Although assurances were given to Estonia that the concept of "near abroad" was not the basis for Russian foreign policy, the issue of "protecting compatriots abroad" found its reflection in the 1993 military doctrine of the Russian Federation.⁴² The assertive statements of Russian politicians and the nature of military exercises characterized the return to hardline practices in Russian foreign policy in the spring of 1993.

³⁷ Taagepera, *Estonia – Return to Independence*, 228.

³⁸ Erik Männik, *Estonian Defence: Ten Years of Development* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies, 2002), 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 194.

⁴¹ Männik, *Estonian Defence: Ten Years of Development*, 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Estonia's next emergent task in consolidating its statehood required the establishment of a common border with the Russian Federation by way of an accepted bilateral agreement. The negotiations regarding the border between Estonia and Russia began in April 1992. On June 21, 1994, in the midst of negotiations, President Yeltsin signed a decree that initiated a unilateral demarcation of the border by Russia.⁴³ The Estonian government renounced its territorial claims in hopes that Russia would reciprocate by recognizing the validity of the Tartu Peace Treaty from 1920 and thus acknowledging the legal continuity of its statehood. This did not happen; in Russia's view, the Treaty was merely a historical document. Furthermore, Russia delayed the process to hinder the Estonian progress towards NATO and EU by keeping the issue unresolved. Eventually, the agreement was reached in 1999 and the text of a border treaty was initialed. Further steps awaited Russia's renewed interest after Estonia achieved NATO and EU membership in 2004. The border treaty was signed in Moscow in 2005 but Russia subsequently withdrew its signature. Russia objected to the references by the parliament of Estonia to the validity of the 1920 treaty, implicitly reaffirming legal continuity.⁴⁴ Hence, to date, the border treaty remains unsigned.

The Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs' inability to come up with sound policies towards the former Soviet republics greatly stimulated the increase of influence of other agencies and actors over these issues and drove Russia into proxy wars on its perimeter with Moldova, Tajikistan, and Georgia. December 1994 indicated the beginning of yet another military conflict on Russia's perimeter, the Chechen war.⁴⁵ During the 1990s, a weakened Russia focused its state rebuilding efforts internally. However, it retained a strong interest in the surrounding areas and the policies toward these regions were frequently accompanied by attempts of intimidation.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 195.

⁴⁵ Männik, *Estonian Defence: Ten Years of Development*, 12.

Between 1994 and 2000, the Russian Federation adopted two National Security Concepts (in 1997 and in 2000). These documents are not binding, but they reflect the development of security thinking in Russia. The 1997 security concept placed threats rising from inside the Russian Federation ahead of international threats while the 2000 concept stressed the international threats (the weakening of OSCE and UN, weakening of Russia's influence, and eastward expansion of NATO) in addition to repeating the previously listed internal ones.⁴⁶

After regaining independence, Estonia adopted the latest National Military Strategy before the NATO accession in 2001. This document indicates Estonia's threat perceptions prior to NATO membership. It outlined that a major attack against Estonia was not considered likely in the short-term, but the military risks, such as military intimidation, coup attack, and full-scale attack on Estonia were as the primary concerns in the development of the EDF.⁴⁷

Estonian politicians and its citizens perceived that the Russian Federation represented the greatest threat to Estonia's independence from 1992-2004. This perception was enhanced as well by Estonia's small size and historical experience. Though Estonia shared values with Western countries, its motivation to integrate into Western structures was at least to the same extent based on its specific threat perceptions.

The Neutrality Option

The lesson from 1939-1940 showed that neutrality was not a viable option. Since neutrality had failed in the first period of independence, there was no reason to believe that it would succeed fifty years later. The unhappy experience of 1939 taught the Estonians not to rely on neutrality. At the same time, many in the international community recommended that they

⁴⁶ Celeste A. Wallander, "Wary of the West: Russian Security Policy at the Millennium," *Arms Control Today* (March 2000), accessed July 25, 2014, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_03/cwmmr00

⁴⁷ Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus, *Eesti sõjalise kaitse strateegia* (Estonian National Military Strategy), 2001, section 2.

follow the example of neutral Finland, which enjoyed a good relationship with Russia. The Estonians were afraid of remaining in a “grey zone” between the West and Russia. Membership in NATO was widely considered to be the only possible guarantee of Estonia’s security.⁴⁸ In October 1991, just two months after the country regained its independence, the speaker of the Estonian Parliament, Ülo Nugis, returning from the session of the North Atlantic Assembly, stated: “Our historical experience has proved that neutrality does not guarantee our security. We can guarantee our security through an alliance’s collective security arrangement. At present, only such an alliance is NATO.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in 1993, Estonian political scientist, Rein Taagepera discussed that in foreign policy, a newly independent Estonia would most likely maintain a neutral stance as long as Sweden and Finland did. If Russian military bases remained in Estonia, the country’s neutrality would inevitably be imperfect. However, balancing the Russian military presence by making military commitments in the Western direction could only complicate matters and delay eventual Russian disengagement from Estonia. Taagepera presumed that if a blatantly nationalist and expansionist dictatorship was established in Russia, then Estonia might seek security guarantees through Western alliances.⁵⁰

The Finnish experience suggested that a small state bordering a large assertive state and pursuing a neutrality policy must be able to identify and to accommodate the crucial security interests of its neighbor and balance them with its own interests. This aspect of “assurance” required credible “deterrence” in order to avoid fully depending on the good will of the larger neighbor.⁵¹ David Vital, a distinguished Israeli political scientist and historian, has claimed that

⁴⁸ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 192.

⁴⁹ Ülo Nugis, “Eesti peab astuma NATO-sse.” *Rahva Häääl* (October 25, 1991), cited in Toomas Riim, “Estonia and NATO: A Constructivist View on a National Interest and Alliance Behaviour,” *Baltic Defence Review*, Volume 8 (2006), 34.

⁵⁰ Taagepera, *Estonia – Return to Independence*, 228.

⁵¹ Tomas Ries, *Cold Will: The Defence of Finland* (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1988), 223-224.

neutrality is far from guaranteeing a security for small states, especially in a situation where a small state is in possession of a strategic geopolitical position in which a stronger state is interested.⁵²

If Estonia were to pursue a neutrality policy, it is most likely that these principles would have become relevant to its security policy very early on. Considering the time of launching the “near abroad” concept, which resulted from Russia’s internal development, and the increasing conservatism in Russia’s security policy, Estonia would have faced problems similar to those of Finland.⁵³ “However, it is doubtful whether the limited powers of Estonia would have sufficed in maintaining independence. Additionally, even on the theoretical level, it would have been almost impossible to accommodate vital Russian interests in Estonia at a level acceptable to Estonia.”⁵⁴

The Regional Cooperation Option

Aside from neutrality, the second security policy alternative available for Estonia after the restoration of its independence was regional cooperation with Finland and the other two Baltic states. Although Estonia initiated regional cooperation, this option alone was not measured sufficient to serve the security interests of the country, while bordering a large assertive state. The four countries cooperating were still not powerful enough to balance the Russian threat.

Estonia and Finland share the coastal border, the same ethnic origin, values, and to some extent the same history. In the 1990s, the cooperation with Finland was predominately one-sided, consisting of Finnish military assistance and donations to the EDF. Besides the cultural and historical reasons, Finland also saw Estonia as the southern flank of its defense. However,

⁵² David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 148–50.

⁵³ Männik, *Estonian Defence: Ten Years of Development*, 14.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Finland as a neutral country could not get too closely involved or form any kind of security alliance with Estonia.

Cooperation with Latvia and Lithuania was different from cooperation with Finland. After regaining independence, all Baltic countries had identified integration into NATO and the EU as their main defense and foreign policy objectives, the former to guarantee their security, and the latter to ensure economic prosperity. To achieve these goals, the countries were determined to collaborate to facilitate the integration process. Baltic military cooperation projects served as a tool to reach the common security policy goals. To demonstrate their preparedness for membership in NATO, the Baltic states formed a joint infantry battalion (BALTBAT), naval squadron (BALTRON), air surveillance system (BALTNET), and staff college (BALTDEFCOL) in the second half of the 1990s. Furthermore, Baltic governments pledged to increase their defense expenditures to reach two per-cent of their respective gross domestic product to conform with NATO's standard.⁵⁵

Erik Männik, an Estonian Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for Defense Studies and a professor at the Baltic Defense College, has argued that if Estonia had chosen to rely only on regional cooperation, the risk of losing its independence would have been high. In its National Security Concept, adopted in 2000, the Russian Federation stated openly that the scale and the level of the threats to its security in the military sphere were increasing with NATO enlargement as one of these threats.⁵⁶ This kind of Russian threat analysis would probably have had a serious impact on Estonia. "First, the proximity of Estonia to the second largest city of the Russian Federation (St. Petersburg) would have likely led to requests for deployment of Russian air defense units to Estonia and the disposition of Russian naval units to Estonian ports. Second, the inclusion of defending the interests of the compatriots living abroad into Russian military

⁵⁵ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 193.

⁵⁶ Männik, *Estonian Defence: Ten Years of Development*, 14.

doctrine had a considerable potential for leading to the forceful incorporation of Estonia into the Russian Federation.”⁵⁷

Integration into Western Structures

Having secured its independence, Estonia sought to distance itself as rapidly as possible from the Soviet legacy. Since Estonian politicians and defense experts did not favor neutrality or regional cooperation, there was in practice only one realistic security policy option for the country: integration into Western economic and security structures. This stance was specified in a document with a fundamental importance for the development of national defense - “Estonia’s Defense Policy Guidelines,” approved by the Parliament on May 7, 1996. In addition to stipulating the general goal of national defense, it postulated on the political side the objective of joining NATO and the Western European Union (WEU)⁵⁸, and stressed the need for international co-operation at various levels.⁵⁹ Estonia’s National Security Concept approved by the Parliament on March 6, 2001, further emphasized the priorities for achieving national security goals. This concept stipulated that integration into European and transatlantic security, political, and economic structures (NATO, EU, and WEU), and the development of a national defense system embodied the first two primacies safeguarding Estonia’s independence.⁶⁰

Furthermore, evidence provided by interviewees supported the position that integration into Western economic and security structures was seen as the only realistic security policy option for the country. Democratic Estonia wanted sovereignty and independence in earnest, not

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The Western European Union (WEU) was merged with the structures of the EU in 2001.

⁵⁹ The Parliament of Estonia, *Estonia’s Defense Policy Guidelines*. 1996, sections 1 and 5.

⁶⁰ The Parliament of Estonia, *National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia*. 2001, sections 1 and 2.

just in name.⁶¹ At the same time, the Russian Federation's desire to keep its sphere of influence in the Baltics was apparent, which was also attested by the events that took place in 1939 and 1940.⁶² Maintaining close relations with Russia would not have reflected the popular will among the public and would have been directly opposite to the sentiments that brought independence back. Staying neutral was not a real option either. Taking into account the recent history, the general feeling of the majority of society of belonging to the West (to Europe), the wish to depart as quickly as possible from the Soviet past, and the unpredictability of Russia made this an obvious option around which the general consensus (political, but also as Estonian society) could be built. What followed in 1995 in Chechnya raised the support and conviction of the understanding that this path was the right one to take.⁶³ Already in 1992-1993, barely a year after the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia started to develop the Karaganov doctrine. This doctrine used the existence of ethnic Russians and other Russian speakers in non-Russian portions of the former Soviet Union as a pretext for meddling into the domestic policies of these states. Particularly, the examples of Moldova and Georgia with their de facto frozen conflicts to this day are clear examples why Estonia rushed to the transatlantic security model.⁶⁴

Estonia enthusiastically joined NATO's new Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994. However, there was the perception that it was offered as a substitute for actual membership. "The three Baltic countries struggled hard to overcome Western hesitation that their alliance membership would evoke a negative Russian reaction. While NATO sought to avoid antagonizing Russia, there was nevertheless a steady stream of threatening remarks made by

⁶¹ Interview with Sven Sakkov, September 15, 2014.

⁶² Interview with General Ants Laaneots, September 10, 2014

⁶³ Interview with Margus Kolga, October 27, 2014.

⁶⁴ Interview with Kristjan Prikk, September 21, 2014.

Russian politicians and officials.”⁶⁵ The Baltic states had to counter the widely held belief that the former boundaries of the Soviet Union constituted a “red line” for NATO that should not be crossed.⁶⁶ Some even raised the issue that they were like high-risk applicants for insurance: those who need insurance most are denied coverage.⁶⁷

The idea of a “Europe whole and free” as a new mission for the NATO alliance was first declared by President George H. W. Bush in 1989. This vision for a new Europe, articulated at the time when the Berlin Wall was still standing, laid the ideological groundwork for the later opening of NATO.⁶⁸ Yet, Stephen Blank, a Senior Research Fellow at the Strategic Studies Institute, argued in 1997, as NATO enlarges and approaches the borders of the Baltic states, it faces one of the most difficult and complex security challenges in contemporary Europe. While the Baltic states desire membership in NATO, Russia considers that outcome as unacceptable, and NATO members themselves remain divided over the wisdom of Baltic membership. “The apparent irreconcilability of NATO’s and Russia’s positions, and the Baltic states’ insistence upon consideration for their security interests, oblige both East and West to collaborate on devising a workable and acceptable security system for the region that respects both Russian and Baltic, not to mention Western, interests.”⁶⁹ Otherwise, the Baltic region might become the flashpoint of a political conflict that could eventually escalate into a military one. Blank

⁶⁵ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 190.

⁶⁶ Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 51.

⁶⁷ Walter Clemens, “The Baltic Reborn: Challenges of Transition,” *Demokratizatsiya* 6, no. 4 (Fall, 1998), accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-53588059/the-baltic-reborn-challenges-of-transition>

⁶⁸ Henrik Praks, *NATO Enlargement: New Strategic Map Strengthens Stability and Freedom* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence Studies, 2014), 1.

⁶⁹ Stephen J. Blank, *NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States: What Can the Great Powers Do?* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1997), 5.

concluded that if the United States, as the most powerful member of NATO, did not lead in the formation of a Baltic security system, nobody else would.⁷⁰

The Western European countries, especially France and Germany, were skeptical about NATO enlargement to the east. For example, France was in the 1990s conducting a systematic campaign against NATO's expansion and strategic reforms. Moreover, many political analysts discussed that France considered Russia an ally in countering the US position in Europe. The security experts also believed that France had shown more respect than other Western states to Russia's demand that NATO should never enlarge crossing the former border of the Soviet Union.⁷¹ The Baltic states at the same time urgently sought to distance themselves as quickly as possible from Russia's sphere of influence and to integrate into NATO. Almost the only way to achieve the goal was to strengthen ties with the United States and to pursue its allied support.

Estonia, along with Latvia and Lithuania, had also more trust in the United States since it never recognized the Soviet annexation and regarded their de jure statehood as uninterrupted. This recognition allowed Baltic countries to retain their consulates in the United States during their fifty-year occupation and in 1990, to claim the restoration of states still existent under international law. Furthermore, the US pressure was instrumental in securing the withdrawal of Russian troops from those small states in the early 1990s.

The United States created a Baltic Charter in 1998 to reassure the Baltic states that they would not be forgotten, even though the NATO 1999 Central European enlargement did not include them. In fact, there was mutual interest; the United States was attracted in expanding the alliance as well. Douglas Stuart, an adjunct professor at the US Army War College, has discussed that former president Bill Clinton's campaign for the NATO eastward extension was an important

⁷⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁷¹ Kai-Helin Kaldas, *The Evolution of Estonian Security Options during the 1990s* (Kingston, ON: Royal Military College of Canada, 2005), 79.

part of a larger effort to drive the US foreign policy debate away from isolationism.⁷² One of the important goals of Clinton's policy of "engagement and enlargement" was the expansion of the community of free-market democracies by strengthening democratic processes in key emerging democratic countries, including the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.⁷³ The United States had interests in new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe because of their proximity to the democratic powers of Western Europe, their importance to US security, and their potential markets.⁷⁴ In supporting NATO extension, the United States was also maximizing its own strength in the post-Cold War unipolar world.⁷⁵ On his first official trip to Europe in June 2001, President Bush gave a major speech in Warsaw in which he stated: "All of Europe's new democracies, from the Baltics to the Black Sea, should have an equal chance of joining Western institutions."⁷⁶

Baltic countries' aspirations and efforts were rewarded in 2002, when the Council decision was made at NATO's Prague summit formally inviting them to join the alliance. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became full members of NATO on March 29, 2004, a year after the US-led Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced.

Washington's decision to invade Iraq was controversial causing a mixed European response. As the United States made preparations for incursion in 2003, Donald Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, rhetorically divided Europe into "old" and "new" – "new" being understood

⁷² Douglas T. Stuart, "Symbol and (Very Little) Substance in the U.S. Debate over NATO Enlargement," in *Will NATO Go East? The Debate over Enlarging the Atlantic Alliance* ed. David G. Haglund (Kingston, ON: Centre for International Relations, Queen's University, 1996), 124.

⁷³ William J. Clinton, "Advancing Our Interests through Engagement and Enlargement," in *American Defense Policy*, ed. Peter L. Hays, Brenda J. Vallance, and Alan R. Van Tassel (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 284.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 296–97.

⁷⁵ Kaldas, *The Evolution of Estonian Security Options during the 1990s*, 80.

⁷⁶ Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2014), 215.

as the Central and Eastern Europe countries who supported the US position, as opposed to those Western European countries who did not.⁷⁷

Part Three

Major Operation Abroad - Operation Iraqi Freedom

Part three of the monograph studies the individual accounts given in the oral history interviews and attempts to address the problem of whether Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the Willing for OIF contributed to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures. It was agreed to first deploy Estonian forces to Iraq in June 2003. The Estonian parliament decided to deploy Estonian troops in a post-conflict security enforcement operation led by the United States. The Estonian forces were incorporated into the international coalition forces in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Iraq with a one-year term of service that needed annual renewal.⁷⁸ Part three also observes that Estonia provided highly professional, learning, and adaptive troops without caveats for OIF, which raised the profile of the country and its military within NATO and in bilateral relations with the United States. Overall, interviews shed some light on six important concerns in the historical record:

1. By joining the Coalition of the Willing for OIF, Estonia showed that it was ready to contribute to a common cause, that it was not trying to become a mere consumer of security, and that it intended to be a security provider as well.
2. The primary political goal was to create close and confident relations with the United States, raise the profile of Estonia among the US political elite, and thus contribute to greater Estonian security.

⁷⁷ Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 193.

⁷⁸ Estonian Parliament decision, *Eesti kaitseväge üksuste kasutamine Eesti riigi rahvusvaheliste kohustuste täitmisel konfliktijärgsel julgeolekutagamissmissioonil Kuveidis, Kataris, Bahreinis ja Iraagis*. 7 May 2003.

3. By joining the Coalition of the Willing, Estonia sought the US support to the country's ongoing efforts to access and integrate into NATO.
4. It can be argued, that Estonia did not ultimately support the US position, but the sympathy was pragmatically derived from the country's own security interest.
5. For Estonia, the decision to join OIF has clearly turned out to be strategically positive. Participation raised the profile of the country and its military within NATO and in bilateral relations with the United States achieving the country's primary strategic goals.
6. OIF was the EDF's first experience in a COIN environment, which challenged the EDF's overall readiness for this particular deployment. Despite the initial limitations, the EDF progressively demonstrated its institutional and professional agility during the campaign, which reflected in the positive strategic effect at the political level.

Conclusion 1: By joining the Coalition of the Willing for OIF, Estonia showed that it was ready to contribute to a common cause, that it was not trying to become a mere consumer of security, and that it intended to be a security provider as well.

Most of those interviewed stated that having made the security policy decision in the 1990s to integrate into Western security structures and being invited to join NATO in 2002, Estonia had to show that it was ready to contribute to a common cause. Harri Tiido, Undersecretary for Security Policy of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2003, emphasized that it was important by joining OIF to show that Estonia was not trying to become a mere consumer of security and that it intended to be a security provider as well. He similarly pointed out the importance of showing the allies, primarily the United States, that Estonian troops were capable of cooperation and that they could be trusted.⁷⁹ There was also a belief that Estonia

⁷⁹ Interview with Harri Tiido, September 26, 2014.

had to be ready to fight in foreign operations and for a common cause in order to contain the security challenges, which otherwise could strike the country in more direct form.⁸⁰

As decisions had been made towards joining NATO, it was only natural to continue Estonia's involvement in international military operations in order to show its allies the capacity for being a co-equal coalition partner. The directive issued by General Aleksander Einseln, Estonian CHOD 1993-1995, on participation in peacekeeping operations in 1995 had already laid a solid foundation for taking bolder steps. It was equally important to confirm Estonia's political support to the US-led coalition with deeds.⁸¹

General Ants Laaneots, Estonian CHOD 2006-2011, further stressed, as one of the strategic objectives of entering Iraq was to prove that, regardless of being a small country, Estonia strives to be per capita an equal contributor to its allies. Second, Estonian troops are professionals and if you are in a team, you have to expend as much effort as the other team members do. Third, to provide service members with war experience and test the quality of their training, organization, and equipment. And fourth, to fight against the inferiority complex among Estonians as a small nation in the field of national defense.⁸²

Estonian decision makers believed that showing maturity for NATO membership also entails readiness to participate in solving global challenges, including standing with future allies. The country had already participated in the planning phase of NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR) and had contributed in the former Yugoslavia in different formats, so this was not unknown territory. Ambassador Jüri Luik added that Estonia had no doubt it would be asking a lot from its allies, so the country had no hesitations in participating in a number of peacekeeping and stabilization operations including Iraq. Since Estonia expected its future allies to put their lives on the line for the country, it had to be ready to do the same for the

⁸⁰ Interview with Margus Kolga, October 27, 2014.

⁸¹ Interview with Major General Riho Terras, September 3, 2014.

⁸² Interview with General Ants Laaneots, September 10, 2014.

allies. Recent events in the region show starkly that Estonia's predictions were true. An aggressive act, such as Russia's intervention in Ukraine, is taking place in Europe, and Estonia's allies have arrived with their troops to the country bolstering support. All the sacrifices are put in perspective by the present situation, they were necessary, so that the US troops would come to Tapa military base, 100 kilometers from the Russian border.⁸³

Conclusion 2: The primary political goal was to create close and confident relations with the United States, raise the profile of Estonia among the US political elite, and thus contribute to greater Estonian security.

The discussion and judgment of the primary political goal entering Iraq as to strengthen US-Estonia security ties was consistent throughout all interviews. This position was also identified in the International Centre for Defense Studies' 2011 analysis, "*The political objectives of Estonia's participation in the international military operations and their attainment.*"

Because of the political split in the international community over the invasion of Iraq, solidarity became a crucial issue for the United States. The issue represented a great divide, and the American leaders observed carefully who supported them only verbally and whose support was revealed in actions, and who was in opposition. The basis for the Estonian foreign and national security policy was first and foremost the desire to express solidarity with the United States. The main political objective of the operation in Iraq was to establish close trustful relations with the United States and make the US political elite aware of Estonia as a trustworthy partner.⁸⁴

⁸³ Interview with Jüri Luik, October 14, 2014.

⁸⁴ Kaarel Kaas, *The Political Objectives of Estonia's Participation in the International Military Operations and Their Attainment* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defense Studies, 2011), 8.

Lord Palmerston, a former British prime minister, has stated that nations have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies but only permanent interests.⁸⁵ It was Estonia's national interest to have sound relationship with the United States.⁸⁶ While being well aware of the political weight of the United States, Estonia was working on building up its future intra-Alliance relationships. Estonian strategic level decision makers clearly saw the months and weeks before OIF started as a pivotal moment when the United States measured its partners and allies based on their attitudes regarding the possible operation in Iraq. At the same time, Estonia was moving closer to achieving its long-term strategic goal of becoming a member of NATO. In this "you're either with us or against us" kind of atmosphere, the decision to support the US position was not easy, but clearly not an overly difficult one either.⁸⁷

Estonia aligned itself with the positions of the Bush administration. What made the situation exceptional, compared to other similar events, was the fact that Estonia's future allies were seriously split over Iraq and in some ways the country had to choose. Estonia chose to side with the United States and against the policy of Germany and France. The stakes would have been high, but luckily, the Council decision inviting Estonia to join NATO was already made in 2002 at the Prague summit. So basically the main target was ratification of Estonian inclusion and the US Congress was here the key institution.⁸⁸

When Estonia became a signatory of the so-called "Vilnius Group" letter⁸⁹ in the beginning of February 2003, the tensions regarding the future of the Iraq crisis were at their peak

⁸⁵ Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.

⁸⁶ Interview with Brigadier General Meelis Kiili, October 29, 2014.

⁸⁷ Interview with Kristjan Prikk, September 21, 2014.

⁸⁸ Interview with Jüri Luik, October 14, 2014.

⁸⁹ "Vilnius Group" is known after a letter signed by 10 Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries in the city of Vilnius to politically support the US position and effort to disarm Iraq. Available at http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=19022 (accessed October 13, 2014).

and emotions within NATO capitals were running high. At the same time, the US Senate had not yet started its “advise and consent” process to discuss the ratification of the protocols of accession to NATO of the seven new member states, including Estonia. Thus, as Harri Tiido stated, choosing a side in the Iraq issue was not a choice between Saddam Hussein and Estonian security, but rather a quick decision on whether Estonia had more to win from US support to the country’s accession to NATO than to lose from, for example, French contempt.⁹⁰ According to Tiido, it was also important to use the participation in Iraq as a “door-opener” in Washington.⁹¹

Sven Sakkov, Undersecretary for Defense Policy of the Estonian Ministry of Defense, further emphasized that the close partnership with the United States was a primary reason behind the decision to join OIF. Estonian security is dependent on the US military presence in Europe. Therefore, the Estonian government clearly calculated that it needed to support the United States, its main ally.⁹²

General Laaneots, while supporting previous positions, opened yet another point of view. The US support that Estonia enjoyed back then and continues to enjoy is of vital importance, since many NATO member states in Western Europe did not (and still do not) discern the threat from Russia and applied a kind of double standard in ensuring security of the Eastern Europe partner states.⁹³

⁹⁰ Harri Tiido, “Kümme aastat Eesti sõja algusest Iraagis,” *Postimees* (March 23, 2013), accessed October 13, 2014, <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/1179066/juhtkiri-kumme-aastat-eesti-soja-algusest-iraagis>

⁹¹ Interview with Harri Tiido, September 26, 2014.

⁹² Interview with Sven Sakkov, September 15, 2014.

⁹³ Interview with General Ants Laaneots, September 10, 2014.

Conclusion 3: By joining the Coalition of the willing, Estonia sought the US support to the country's ongoing efforts to access and integrate into NATO.

Most of the decision makers interviewed for this study indicated that part of the political calculus of joining OIF was to seek US support for the country's accession into NATO. Since regaining its independence in 1991, a key element of the Estonian foreign and security policy was a complete integration into Western organizations, particularly NATO and the EU. Hence, being part of an operation supported by a majority of the NATO community was another step towards fulfilling this goal.

Looking back at developments in 2003, Estonia's first encounter with the alliance security dilemma already took place before becoming a full member of NATO. Estonia had to support the US War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq. Baltic support for the war against terror and to the US-led effort to disarm Iraq were the topics discussed in the US Senate when evaluating the worthiness of the Baltic states to become NATO members.⁹⁴ "Without US support, Estonian chances of joining NATO were non-existent. To confirm its loyalty and commitment with deeds, Estonia deployed its platoon-sized light infantry contingent to Baghdad. By doing this, Estonia made little difference on the ground, but rendered additional political support to the US-led Coalition of the Willing."⁹⁵ Supporting the United States virtually guaranteed a smooth ratification of Estonian inclusion to NATO in the US Congress. Estonia subsequently took some pressure in supporting the United States early on; President Chirac of France was saddened by the fact that the Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries did not use their opportunity to be silent.⁹⁶

Sven Sakkov took even a wider look by claiming that it was not just about one country - Estonia - but rather a question about the Trans-Atlantic partnership of the North Atlantic

⁹⁴ Erik Männik, *Estonia's Integration into NATO: Opportunities and Willingness of a Small State* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2005), 242-248.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Interview with Jüri Luik, October 14, 2014.

Alliance. Washington's decision to invade Iraq was a controversial one. The European response was mixed with the United Kingdom, Denmark, and the CEE countries joining the effort while a number of Western European allies (dubbed "Old Europe" by Secretary Rumsfeld) did not. If the CEE countries had not joined OIF, the health of Trans-Atlantic relations would have worsened even further.⁹⁷

Estonia was demonstrating a high level of political and diplomatic activism that was in good accordance with the country's threat perceptions. Estonia was trying to stay in the focus of US attention and avoid marginalization in NATO. Estonia tried to harmonize such activities with its own very practical and realistic security interests. In developing its profile in NATO, Estonia focused on the development of its credibility in terms of verbal practices and behavior, as well as providing specific capabilities to the Alliance.⁹⁸

Conclusion 4: It can be argued, that Estonia did not ultimately support the US position, but the sympathy was pragmatically derived from the country's own security interest.

The perspective, that Estonia's sympathy to the controversial US-led effort to disarm Iraq, was pragmatically derived from the country's own security interest was consistent throughout all interviews. At the same time, not all interviewees agreed that Estonia did not ultimately support the US political position.

The list of valid political objectives and procedures that are related to operations abroad from the past, as well as current missions is short and is based on the assumption that the primary objective of the Estonian foreign and national security policy has always been ensuring national security. This is because before joining NATO, Estonia was in a security deficit position, and after joining NATO and the EU, Estonia was (and remains) a small country in a sensitive

⁹⁷ Interview with Sven Sakkov, September 15, 2014.

⁹⁸ Männik, *Estonia's Integration into NATO: Opportunities and Willingness of a Small State*, 242-248.

geographical region. Military operations abroad have been utilized as an instrument of foreign and security policy, the function of which has been to enhance the position of Estonia in the international security environment. The most important factor for Estonia has been the national security and international position of the country rather than solving the problems in a particular area of operations.⁹⁹

As Sakkov also pointed out, Estonia's one and overwhelming strategic concern was the security of the country itself. Estonia joined OIF not because of Tallinn's concern over weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, but because of a need to support the United States and thus strengthen bilateral ties and Estonian security.¹⁰⁰

General Laaneots further discussed that many security experts in Estonia understood that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein would shift the balance between the Sunnis and Shias in the Middle East, but could not anticipate the grave implications that can be realized today - the emerging Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) influence in the region. Estonia was inspired by the practical necessity to ensure its own security.¹⁰¹

The belief, "If Estonia supported the United States when the United States needed it, Estonia can expect US military support when needed as well," definitely reflects the core thinking behind the decision to join OIF. At the same time, there was also a wide confidence that the US arguments, presented by Secretary of State Powell at the UN in January 2003, were persuasive enough to support the moral argument for being part of the international coalition. As Harri Tiido argued, Estonia had its own doubts but did not possess any information to claim that the US position was wrong.¹⁰² Major General Riho Terras, the current Estonian Chief of Defense, added

⁹⁹ Kaas, *The Political Objectives of Estonia's Participation in the International Military Operations and Their Attainment*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Sven Sakkov, September 15, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Interview with General Ants Laaneots, September 10, 2014.

¹⁰² Interview with Harri Tiido, September 26, 2014.

that the political sentiment was rather on the US side, and emotionally it seemed right to support the military intervention.¹⁰³

Conclusion 5: For Estonia, the decision to join OIF has clearly turned out to be strategically positive. Participation raised the profile of the country and its military within NATO and in bilateral relations with the United States achieving the country's primary strategic goals.

The assessment of positive achievement of strategic goals by entering Iraq was consistent throughout all oral history interviews conducted for this research. Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the Willing for OIF contributed to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures. Participation supported considerably Estonia's main policy lines – strong strategic partnership and cooperation with the United States and gaining membership in NATO. The steps taken supported the principles of the US-Baltic Charter and Continuation of Reforms document delivered to NATO.¹⁰⁴ According to a near consensual opinion from interviews, Estonia achieved the country's primary strategic goals by participating in military operations in Iraq.

Involvement in OIF created a special bilateral relationship with the United States that otherwise could not have been achieved. A caveat-free participation in Iraq and later in Afghanistan raised the profile of Estonia and its military within NATO and in bilateral relations with the United States. As a result, several of Estonia's immediate security concerns have been addressed, particularly between 2008-2014.¹⁰⁵ In a deteriorating security situation due to the Ukrainian conflict, the United States has clearly indicated its will to assist and support Estonia.

¹⁰³ Interview with Major General Riho Terras, September 3, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Margus Kolga, October 27, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Kristjan Prikk, September 21, 2014.

One of the examples is the currently allocated US rotational military detachment on Estonian soil.¹⁰⁶

According to Ambassador Luik, participation in OIF provided Estonia with an abundance of political “firepower” when solving the country’s own security issues. It was particularly the case, because Estonian soldiers became known as exceptional and their participation in Iraq and Afghanistan was not symbolic, but substantial and motivated.¹⁰⁷ Estonia’s ties with the United States and other participating Allies became closer. Due to stronger allied ties, it was easier for Estonia to convey varying political messages in the Allied capitals and Estonian troops became recognized for their capabilities.¹⁰⁸ Estonia’s decision to join OIF was also a sign of its political leadership’s growing awareness over the importance and ways to use the military instrument of national power to achieve broader strategic objectives.¹⁰⁹

General Laaneots agreed that Estonia achieved its strategic goals and further emphasized that the country proved itself to the Western nations, especially the United States, as an equal partner. In Iraq, the foundation and building block was laid for the growth of authority of Estonia and its defense forces among NATO member states. The prestige among the Alliance was further enhanced and solidified by participation in Afghanistan.¹¹⁰

Taking a wider prospective, Estonia among other CEE countries, notably the “Vilnius Group”, took a risk of alienating big European countries who opposed the effort to go after the alleged WMD in Iraq. That was again illustrated by President Chirac of France who scoffed at the

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Brigadier General Meelis Kiili, October 29, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Jüri Luik, October 14, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Harri Tiido, September 26, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Brigadier General Indrek Sirel, November 22, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Interview with General Ants Laaneots, September 10, 2014.

Vilnius 10 process that those countries are not in the “family” yet.¹¹¹ In the end, those CEE countries were admitted to both the EU and NATO. The NATO alliance recovered from the fall-out from the acrimony over Iraq. Estonia earned a reputation of being a capable country willing to take considerable risks in supporting its main ally – the United States. The strength and cohesion of NATO is clearly having a strategic implication to Estonian security. Especially now, after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, NATO has implemented assurance measures to strengthen deterrence covering the easternmost NATO allies and concerning the implementation of decisions taken at the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014. There is no direct link between the OIF coalition and the Wales Summit of course, but as aforementioned, the fact that NATO is alive and well is partly due to most European allies standing up and supporting the US-led effort in Iraq.¹¹²

Conclusion 6: OIF was the EDF’s first experience in a COIN environment, which challenged the EDF’s overall readiness for this particular deployment. Despite the initial limitations, the EDF progressively demonstrated its institutional and professional agility during the campaign, which reflected in the positive strategic effect at the political level.

Most of those interviewed indicated that the Estonian Defense Forces and the Ministry of Defense experienced a rather steep learning curve due to the COIN environment, the Iraq climate, and logistical difficulties related to the operation. All posed challenges that Estonia had never experienced before. Hence, in the initial stages of the participation, a quite tactical view of the situation and upcoming challenges prevailed in Tallinn. However, military experience and defense policy leadership increased and were able to tie strategic level developments into decision making, despite Estonia’s small-scale military participation in OIF.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Interview with Sven Sakkov, September 15, 2014.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Interview with Kristjan Prikk, September 21, 2014.

For the EDF, OIF was the first encounter with a COIN environment. Brigadier General Indrek Sirel, a former Commander of the Estonian Army, argued that the lack of COIN doctrine led to the associated issues with force preparation for the first deploying units. Organizationally, none of the EDF units contained structures or specific capabilities required to conduct COIN operations. Pre-deployment training focused on regular infantry tactics. The consequence was that the initial units lacked or received substandard training in situational and cultural awareness, counter improvised explosive device (C-IED) techniques, enabler integration, language, and the methods required to integrate interpreters. To compound the problem, there was a shortage of essential force protection, desert, and COIN-related equipment. The tactical level leadership and personnel systems were the only elements partially prepared for the deployment.¹¹⁴

Most of the EDF experience and expertise were gained through practical application and lessons learned once deployed. The EDF readiness progressed significantly during OIF and eventually Estonian troops were able to apply COIN tactics. Estonian units started off with very old 35M trucks, also referred to as the “deuce and a half,” that were armored with available means already in Baghdad. At the end of OIF, Estonian troops were employing purpose-armored Unimog trucks, electronic counter measure jammers, and modern night-vision equipment. Prior to Iraq, the EDF participated in international military operations in Lebanon, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The operational environments in these countries were more benign than in Iraq. Additionally, experience gained in Iraq helped the EDF to prepare for a deployment to the Helmand province in Afghanistan in 2006.

Major General Terras added that the Estonian Army lacked combat experience and preparation in COIN, but by virtue of good infantry training and flexible leadership, the army adjusted quickly. Working out technical solutions was also important. In retrospect, several US generals, like General Martin Dempsey, have admitted that the Estonians managed to convince

¹¹⁴ Interview with Brigadier General Indrek Sirel, November 22, 2014.

the allies of their capability through its effective tactics and bold actions.¹¹⁵ Terras also mentioned that in 2007, “*Stars and Stripes*” referred to Estonians as Special Forces with superb competence in COIN, which was a great compliment to regular infantry soldiers.¹¹⁶ The Estonian soldiers stood out in Iraq as highly professional. The EDF gained war experience, tested the organization, and revised training programs for officers and soldiers. According to General Laaneots, respect towards Estonia increased considerably among NATO member states.¹¹⁷

The fact that the Estonian government did not caveat its troops in OIF was often and truly noted at the strategic level. Even though a platoon was a minor contribution to OIF, it fought in dangerous neighborhoods, without caveats. Two EDF soldiers killed in action and a high number of wounded in action testified to it. Since international efforts to sort out problems in Iraq were at the center of US foreign policy, even a platoon had a strategic effect at the political level. In the final stage of OIF, Estonia was among the five countries requested by the Iraqi government to stay behind for the first half of 2009. Because of the inflexibility of the Iraqi government concerning a status of force agreement (SOFA), Estonian forces were unable to stay in Iraq after the end of 2008.¹¹⁸

When assessing the mission in Iraq, it is important to understand that a real battlefield experience is the only method for testing the military capabilities of any army. The EDF engaged in the world’s largest military operation at the time as a co-equal coalition partner for six years. It is equally important to observe that unlike some other Eastern and Central European countries, the Estonian troops performed all the military tasks assigned without any restrictions.¹¹⁹ During

¹¹⁵ Interview with Major General Riho Terras, September 3, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Interview with General Ants Laaneots, September 10, 2014.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Sven Sakkov, September 15, 2014.

¹¹⁹ The Headquarters of the Estonian Defence Forces, *Analysis of the Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Chief of Defense to the Minister of Defense* (Tallinn: 2005).

OIF, Estonian troops demonstrated their professionalism and acted courageously without losing their nerve, even on the most formidable tasks. This has created a positive image of Estonia in international coalitions and enhanced the achievement of the strategic objectives of the country.

When discussing the EDF lessons learned from OIF, it cannot be forgotten that Estonian light infantry platoons acted together with the US Army, the units of which were not conceptually or practically ready for the conflict in its second phase (COIN). Besides, the tactical groups of the battalion were differently trained and operated differently in the operational area. The fact that the US Army was not ready for a COIN environment allowed the EDF to endure the process with US forces. It also means that the Estonian troops acted in the first half of the operation according to a strategy that was not suitable for defeating insurgent resistance and stabilizing the country. The lack of strategy and inability to conduct COIN casts doubts on the results and outcomes of Estonian participation in OIF (what will happen to Iraq and how does this affect the stability in the Middle East in the near future?).

Therefore, it is essential for the EDF to further develop its doctrine for waging asymmetrical wars in order to: (1) take rational strategic decisions in taking part in COIN and asymmetric operations; (2) understand and judge the adequacy of the strategies implemented by international coalitions; and (3) effectively operate at the tactical level. All while contributing to the success of coalition operations by tying tactical events to strategic objectives.

Conclusion

This study has concerned itself with Estonia's security policy and decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. The thesis argued that historical experiences have deeply influenced Estonia's security policy choices in 1990s, which in turn played a key role in the country's decision to join the OIF coalition. The purpose of this monograph was to demonstrate that Estonia's decision to participate in OIF was based on the pragmatic calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security.

The present thesis, as qualitative research, focused mainly on the analysis of information from primary sources (written official documents and oral history interviews). The interviews aimed at both the Estonian civilian and military leadership that were the decision makers at the time. The theoretical base used in this monograph is realist theory, particularly those aspects dealing with small states' behavior in foreign policy. For a small country, seeking a distant and powerful protector is a typical practice in international politics. According to the realist "balance of threat" concept, states' alliance behavior is determined by the threats they perceive from other states. Stephen Walt claims that states generally balance by allying against a perceived threat.¹²⁰

The historical background has shaped the Estonians' mindset, national character, and the country's defense policy decisions in the 1990s. Different regional powers conquered Estonia throughout its history and the brief period of independence between the two world wars was lost after the country attempted to pursue a policy of neutrality. The twentieth century witnessed both Soviet and German occupations, while Estonia lost, through killings, refugees, or deportations, approximately one fourth of its pre-war population during the Second World War. The post Second World War period as an annexed country to the Soviet Union further deteriorated the situation. Estonia's desire for freedom and independence has been an enduring phenomenon.

After regaining independence in 1991, Estonia had theoretically three basic security options: pursuing a neutrality policy, cooperating regionally with Finland and the other two Baltic states, or striving toward integration into Western structures. Based on historical experience and specific threat perception, the first two options were considered as nonviable. Therefore, all Estonian governments since the restoration of independence have made efforts to integrate the country into Western economic and security structures, such as the EU and NATO. Estonia's decision to join OIF in 2003 was a logical continuation to the country's security policy choices.

Historical evidence indicates that Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the Willing for OIF was based mainly on the calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security

¹²⁰ Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," 4.

through increased US-Estonia security ties while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures. Moreover, the historical evidence clarified or supported six singular points of fact in this case:

1. By joining the Coalition of the Willing for OIF, Estonia showed that it was ready to contribute to a common cause, that it was not trying to become a mere consumer of security, and that it intended to be a security provider as well.
2. The primary political goal was to create close and confident relations with the United States, raise the profile of Estonia among the US political elite, and thus contribute to greater Estonian security.
3. By joining the Coalition of the Willing, Estonia sought the US support to the country's ongoing efforts to access and integrate into NATO.
4. It can be argued, that Estonia did not ultimately support the US position, but the sympathy was pragmatically derived from the country's own security interest.
5. For Estonia, the decision to join OIF has clearly turned out to be strategically positive. Participation raised the profile of the country and its military within NATO and in bilateral relations with the United States achieving the country's primary strategic goals.
6. OIF was the EDF's first experience in a COIN environment, which challenged the EDF's overall readiness for this particular deployment. Despite the initial limitations, the EDF progressively demonstrated its institutional and professional agility during the campaign, which reflected in the positive strategic effect at the political level.

The current geo-political situation shows directly that Estonia's security policy choices in the 1990s and decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing in support of OIF in 2003 have been strategically well calculated. An overt act, such as Russian aggression against Ukraine, is taking place in Europe, and Estonia's allies have arrived with their troops to bolster support and strengthen deterrence.

Bibliography

- Asmus, Ronald D. *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Blank, Stephen J. *NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States: What Can the Great Powers Do?* Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1997.
- Brown, Chris, and Kirsten Ainley. *Understanding International Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Clemens, Walter J. Jr., *The Baltic Transformed: Complexity Theory and European Security*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001.
- . "The Baltic Reborn: Challenges of Transition." *Demokratizatsiya* 6, no. 4 (Fall, 1998). Accessed July 29, 2014. <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-53588059/the-baltic-reborn-challenges-of-transition>.
- Clinton, William J. "Advancing Our Interests through Engagement and Enlargement." In *American Defense Policy*, edited by Peter L. Hays, Brenda J. Vallance, and Alan R. Van Tassel, 284-297. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Crowe, David M. *The Baltic States and the Great Powers: Foreign Relations, 1938–1940*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993.
- Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus, *Eesti sõjalise kaitse strateegia* (Estonian National Military Strategy), 28 February 2001.
- Estonian Parliament decision, Eesti kaitseväge üksuste kasutamine Eesti riigi rahvusvaheliste kohustuste täitmisel konfliktijärgsel julgeolekutagamissmisioonil Kuveidis, Kataris, Bahreinis ja Iraagis. 7 May 2003.
- Gvosdev, Nikolas K., and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2014.
- Iwaskiw, Walter R. ed., *Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Country Studies*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1996.
- Jervis, Robert. "Understanding the Bush Doctrine." *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 3 (Fall, 2003): 365-388.
- Kaas, Kaarel. *The Political Objectives of Estonia's Participation in the International Military Operations and Their Attainment*. Tallinn: International Centre for Defense Studies, 2011.
- Kaldas, Kai-Helin. *The Evolution of Estonian Security Options during the 1990s*. Kingston, ON: Royal Military College of Canada, 2005.
- Karsh, Efraim. *Neutrality and Small States*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Kasekamp, Andres. *A History of the Baltic States*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

- Küng, Hans. *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Laaneots, Ants. *Eesti Vabariigi julgeolekukontseptsiooni areng aastail 1991-1994 ja kõrgkoolid*. Aulaloeng, 8.02.1996.
- Laar, Mart. *War in the Woods: Estonia's Struggle for Survival 1944-1956*. Washington, DC: The Compass Press, 1992.
- Lerche, Charles O. Jr., *Principles of International Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Männik, Erik. *Estonia's Integration into NATO: Opportunities and Willingness of a Small State*. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2005.
- . *Estonian Defence: Ten Years of Development*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies, 2002.
- Misiunas, Romuald J., and Rein Taagepera. *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.
- Nugis, Ülo. "Eesti peab astuma NATO-sse." *Rahva Hääl* (October 25, 1991), cited in Toomas Riim, "Estonia and NATO: A Constructivist View on a National Interest and Alliance Behaviour." *Baltic Defence Review*, Volume 8 (2006): 35-52.
- O'Connor, Kevin. *The History of the Baltic States*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003.
- Praks, Henrik. *NATO Enlargement: New Strategic Map Strengthens Stability and Freedom*. Tallinn: International Centre for Defence Studies, 2014.
- Raun, Toivo U. *Estonia and the Estonians*, 2nd ed. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1991.
- Rice, Condoleeza. "The Making of Soviet Strategy." In *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret, 648-676. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Ries, Tomas. *Cold Will: The Defence of Finland*. London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988.
- Smith, Graham. ed., *The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994.
- "Statement of the Vilnius Group Countries." Sofia News Agency (February 5, 2003). Accessed October 13, 2014. http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=19022.
- Stuart, Douglas T. "Symbol and (Very Little) Substance in the U.S. Debate over NATO Enlargement." In *Will NATO Go East? The Debate over Enlarging the Atlantic Alliance*, edited by David G. Haglund, 117-145. Kingston, ON: Centre for International Relations, Queen's University, 1996.

- Taagepera, Rein. *Estonia – Return to Independence*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993.
- The Headquarters of the Estonian Defense Forces, *Analysis of the Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Chief of Defense to the Minister of Defense* (Tallinn: 2005).
- The Parliament of Estonia, *Estonia's Defense Policy Guidelines*. 7 May 1996.
- The Parliament of Estonia, *National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia*. 2001.
- The Parliament of Estonia, *National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia*. 2004.
- Tiido, Harri. "Kümme aastat Eesti sõja algusest Iraagis." *Postimees* (March 23, 2013). Accessed October 13, 2014. <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/1179066/juhtkiri-kumme-aastat-estis-soja-algusest-iraagis>.
- Vital, David. *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Wallander, Celeste A. "Wary of the West: Russian Security Policy at the Millennium." *Arms Control Today* (March 2000). Accessed July 25, 2014. http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_03/cwmr00.
- Walt, Stephen M. "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power." *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985): 3-43.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.
- Interviews:
- General Ants Laaneots. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 10, 2014.
- Vice Admiral Tarmo Kõuts. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 9, 2014.
- Major General Riho Terras. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 3, 2014.
- Major General Neeme Väli. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 26, 2014.
- Brigadier General Meelis Kiili. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. October 29, 2014.
- Brigadier General Indrek Sirel. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. November 22, 2014.
- Mr. Harri Tiido. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 26, 2013.

Mr. Jüri Luik. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. October 14, 2014.

Mr. Kristjan Prikk. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 21, 2014.

Mr. Margus Kolga. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. October 27, 2014.

Mr. Sven Sakkov. Interviewed by Janno Märk. Email Interview. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. September 15, 2014.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Mam,

The present questionnaire has been composed to gather information for my School of Advanced Military Studies' Monograph. Interviews focus on Estonian civilian and military leadership that were the decision makers at the time Estonia entered the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003.

The title of the Monograph:

Strategic calculation in Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

The primary research question:

What were the strategic calculations and implications in Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the willing for OIF in 2003?

Sub-questions:

- a. What have been the main factors in shaping the mindset of Estonians, their national character, and the country's defense policy goals and decisions?
- b. What was the readiness of Estonian troops to conduct Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in OIF and what were the lessons learned? How did it feed back to the strategic level?

The aim of this research is to better understand Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the willing for OIF, and the degree to which it was based on the calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties while also furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures.

I would prefer your responses to be attributable. However, if you desire, your anonymity will be guaranteed, that is, the information will be quoted and referred to without revealing your name or position.

I truly hope that you find time to answer the questionnaire as the sources in this field are rather scarce or classified, and as a qualitative research, the present thesis focuses mainly on the analysis of the information from primary sources (official documents, questionnaires, oral history interviews, etc.). The information from the interviews will contribute substantially to the understanding of Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the willing for OIF in 2003.

Thank you in advance,

Yours truly,

LTC Janno Märk
International Military Student
School of Advanced Military Studies
US Army Command and General Staff College

Questionnaire

1. Do you agree that integration into Western economic and security structures such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was in practice only one realistic security policy option for Estonia after regaining independence in 1991?
2. What were the strategic calculations in Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003? What were Estonia's strategic objectives in entering Iraq?
3. To what extent do you think that Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the willing for OIF was based on the calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through increased US-Estonia security ties?
4. To what extent do you think that Estonia's decision to join the Coalition of the willing for OIF was based on the calculation that it would contribute to greater Estonian security through furthering the country's ongoing efforts to integrate into NATO structures?
5. Can it be argued that Estonia did not ultimately support the U.S. position, but the sympathy was pragmatically derived from country's own security interest? (If Estonia supported the U.S. when the U.S. needed, Estonia can expect U.S. military support when needed as well.)
6. What were the strategic implications in Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for OIF in 2003? Did it contribute to greater Estonian security in a way expected? What facts do you think support that position?
7. What was the readiness of Estonian troops to conduct Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in OIF and what were the lessons learned?
8. How did Estonian troops' tactical participation in OIF feed back to the strategic level?
9. Considering the aim of the thesis, is there anything else you would like to mention regarding the subject?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Release

Investigator:

My name is Janno Märk, and I am a graduate student at the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. I am now going to explain the study to you. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have about the research; I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail.

I am interested in learning more about Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the Willing for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003. You will be asked to answer the questionnaire, which has been composed to gather information for my School of Advanced Military Studies' Monograph. Interviews focus on Estonian civilian and military leaders who were decision makers at the time Estonia entered Iraq. This will take approximately one hour of your time.

I would prefer your responses to be attributable. However, if you desire, your anonymity will be guaranteed, that is, the information will be quoted and referred to without revealing your name or position.

I hope that you agree to participate in this study and can find the time to answer the questionnaire. Your experience and knowledge in this area are critical to developing an accurate understanding of the topic. The information from this interview will contribute substantially to the understanding of Estonia's decision to enter the Coalition of the willing for OIF in 2003. If you do not wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

Participant:

All of my questions and concerns about this study have been addressed. I choose, voluntarily, to participate in this research project. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

printed name of participant

signature of participant

date

printed name of investigator

signature of investigator

date